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AN ADDRESS

Spoken in the College Chapel, Cambridge,

October 28, 1864,

AT THE FUNERAL OF

BRIG.-GEN. CHARLES RUSSELL LOWELL,

WHO FELL AT THE BATTLE OF CEDAR CREEK,

October 19, 1864.

BY GEORGE PUTNAM.





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A D D R E S S .

THE body of CHARLES RUSSELL LOWELL, brought in honorable and affectionate custody from the distant valley where he fell, lies here before us for the customary rites.

His one brother (and what a pair was that in endowments and character to be the possession and the crown of a single household!) sleeps at Nelson's farm on the Peninsula, and no funeral words were said over him. It was the same with his almost brothers in the flesh, and quite in the heart's affections, Robert G. Shaw and Cabot Russel, buried in the sands of Fort Wagner ; — the same with his near relative, Warren Russell, and his well-beloved classmate, Savage, and his life-long friend and compeer, Stephen G. Perkins, all buried in Virginia. We need not grieve for them on this account. The soldier, if he might choose for his own sake alone, would naturally prefer to have his resting-place on the spot

where death found him in the way of honor and duty, and would ask no funeral honors but those of a comrade's tear, and the witnessing stars, and the whispered requiem of the trees ; — yet we will remember those dear and noble ones in this day's solemn service of love and religion. If these marble lips could move, they would bid us couple their name and memory with his. And they, if they still have sympathy with earthly doings, would gladly have his funeral rites made theirs, and their only ones, by any thought or mention of their names with his. They loved him so much, and looked up to him with such ardor of admiration and affection !

William Lowell Putnam, who fell at Ball's Bluff, had his burial, just three years ago this day, from amid the endearments of his home, yet his name forces itself upon my lips in this connection, for he was verily one with this kinsman, in blood, in spirit, and fraternal love.

And besides these near ones, may we not spare a moment's space in these solemnities to bring to mind with him, in a comprehensive kind of All-Saints commemoration, the many who followed him, and fell with him on that field of glorious daring and achievement, unknown to us, but valiant and faithful men, our

friends and champions all, who gave up their lives with him, and for us and ours.

I think I had better not cumber this burial-service with dates or minute biographical details of Colonel Lowell's life,* of little less than thirty years. These will be recited in other more durable records of him. The lesson of his life and of his death is what we have to contemplate here to-day.

One of his most intimate associates, knit to him in a friendship true, tender, and lifelong, tells me that in his friend's childhood there was in him all the strength and beauty and manifold pre-eminence that marked his matured character.

Of what he was to his very own,—to the home of his birth, or that to which a year ago he bore his young bride in joy and hope,—I dare not in this presence say a single word.

His college classmates, if the proprieties of the hour and the bursting fulness of their hearts would permit them to speak out here in a body, as they do elsewhere individually, would tell us

* The title "Colonel" was used in the Address, and is the one most familiar and endeared to his family and friends. It was known, however, on the day of the funeral, that his commission as Brigadier-General had been issued before his death, on the recommendation and request of General Sheridan.

how they all, without a dissenting mind or voice, regarded him in college days and ever since as their foremost man, — first in almost every good gift and acquirement, — his name the brightest on their page of the catalogue, — his leadership in the things of the intellect, and in the things of the heart and soul, their pride and honor. They would tell us how his superiority was so distinctly marked, so unanimously confessed, yet so graciously borne, that it never stirred an emotion of envy or rivalry; but that the moments when they noted and felt that pre-eminence were moments of elevation and delight, — as waking up to consciousness and setting aglow whatever was best and noblest in themselves. And they would not tell us, but we know, that amid the memories and griefs of this hour, they will lay new vows of pure and noble living on the altar beneath which the form of their best man lies garlanded for the grave.

He graduated here in 1854, with the highest honors, and that not only in the technical sense of that phrase; but leaving in the minds of the instructors such respect for him, and such expectations concerning him, as they have seldom entertained in an equal, and never perhaps in a higher, degree for a young alumnus.

With the world before him, and competent

for whatever career he might choose, his bias was for practical life, for doing things rather than for writing or talking about them, for business rather than literature. He connected himself successively with two or three large industrial establishments, and, with the exception of two years' travel in Europe for health and improvement, devoted himself with his wonted zeal and energy to the labors and studies befitting his vocation.

In April, 1861, at the first alarm of war, he hastened to Washington, and offered his services to the Government. He was accepted, and henceforth his brief history identifies itself with that of the Army of the Potomac, and its auxiliary forces and adjacent departments. I must omit the incidents of his career as a captain in the United States Cavalry service, as commander of the Second Massachusetts Cavalry, and finally of a brigade. I must not indulge myself in following him through his long campaigning and his numerous battles, except to say that wherever was the most active and perilous service, there he most wished to be, and full often had his wish.

When he entered the army, he was determined in his choice, no doubt, by the exigency of the time. The controlling motive with him, as it

has been with so many of our noblest, was a lofty and unselfish patriotism. He would live for his country, and die for it, if so it should be ordered. But apart from this high motive, those who knew him best judged that he had chosen wisely, as being admirably fitted for a military career. Perhaps their sense of the manifoldness and completeness of his mental and moral forces and furnishings would have led them to the same prejudgment of him in connection with any other mode of activity that he might have chosen. At any rate, they so judged in respect to this which he did adopt.

He had a lithe and intensely vital frame, with not an ounce of superfluous weight, and every fibre of it on the stretch, as with a self-moving activity. He had a flashing quickness of intellectual perception, a keen, exhaustive power of analysis, and intense concentrativeness of mind, which would give him a rapid and thorough mastery of military science, and in the field would enable him to form rapid and extended combinations, and make him quick and sure in devising expedients for the exigencies of the moment. With all the fervor of his make, he had a self-possession absolutely imperturbable by temper or any passion. He

had a high degree of executive ability for carrying straight out a pre-arranged plan or a sudden purpose. There was born in him the spirit of command, which made him a ruler of men, not by assumption of power, but by the anointing of God. He bore sway in the private friendly circle, where he claimed and exacted nothing, and would bear it not less, we might be sure, in a sphere where authority became a duty. He was endowed with that magnetic, inspiring power, which we cannot define or trace, but know it when we feel it or observe its working, by which he could communicate with a flash his thought, his will, his impulse, to those in contact with him, whether one man or a thousand; so that where he led he would be followed, through whatever storm of fire and death. With all his rigor of will and absoluteness of command, he had what is becoming in a commander,—great sweetness, gentleness, tenderness of spirit, that softened away all harshness. His men, we are assured, loved him as a brother; and perhaps those men, rough and hard it may be, but with hearts in them, and feeling the warmth of his, know better than most of us, or than we need tell if we did, what he must have been as son and brother and husband in his home.

He carried into the army the same principle that he had acted on in the mill and the mine, that of doing his utmost to raise and enlighten those about him. He gathered around him the men connected with his head-quarters, to give them, in leisure hours, systematic instruction in matters improving to themselves and useful to the service. This was in the spirit of a plan formed by him while in college, and elaborated even to its details. He was deeply impressed with the value of the peculiar advantages of education which he had enjoyed, as compared with the less favored classes. He felt that he owed a great debt somewhere, and must pay it somehow, and this was to be his way of paying it,—to devote the best efforts of his life to raising the standard of knowledge and character among working men.

Of his personal bravery I know not what would have been predicted, but what it proved to be in fact is known to all who have watched his course. Let those thirteen horses shot under him in this single glorious campaign of the Shenandoah bear their dumb testimony, and tell us where their rider was to be found when the fight waxed hottest on the perilous edge of battle. It was in him far more and higher than the mere courage of the heated conflict ; it was

the valor of a predetermined and unreserved self-devotion ; it was the calm, complete renunciation of every thought of the chances of life or death, whenever a military duty or a military opportunity pointed out his way. He was the man to lead a charge. He could not falter ; nor hardly could one man in his ranks falter, with him at the head. In his last gallant and successful charge, he would not heed his first wound, which struck him speechless, and probably would have proved fatal. He would not retire, but pressed on, till the second came, and then there was no choice for him. He lingered some hours without pain, and then yielded up his life, with a certain tenderness of regret it must have been, for he knew the hearts that yearned toward him from afar ; yet submissively, for it was God's will ; cheerfully, for it was for his dear country ; triumphantly, for it was in the arms of victory.

O friends, I leave it to you to fill up, from your own memories and affections, my poor, faint outline of the character and life of this true man and soldier. Fill it up for yourselves, young men, and release me from further attempts ; for I am of another generation, and too old to do it in such colors and proportions as are claimed for it by your better knowledge,

quicker sympathies, and more ardent appreciation.

And now, has this fair spirit fled too early, — this fresh, strong life closed too soon? Too soon, we say, when we think of the high earthly possibilities and promises contained in it. Too soon, we say, when we think of our country's need of such as he. Too soon, we say, when we take counsel only with the affections. Our poor, fond hearts do so cling to their beloved, and demand the sight of the eyes, and the continuance of these visible ties, and do feel so desolate in the anguish of parting.

And yet not too soon, friends! From the highest plane of thought and feeling, — the plane above the senses, the understanding, and even the heart, — from the plane of the soul, the serene heights of faith, we must say, and we will and do, Not too soon! There is an all-wise Disposer of the issues of life and death, and present being opens into the life eternal, and therefore it cannot be too soon.

And, moreover, in the supreme believing moods of the soul, we know that the value of a life consists not in its length, but in the character attained and the work done in it. A short life may be very complete, and a long one may be all shapeless and ravelled. To the good and

faithful, there is no such thing as untimely death. The fruits of the spirit are always ripe for the heavenly garner, and though the reaper come before the harvest-time, it is not too soon.

“He liveth long who liveth well ;
All other life is short and vain.”

Says the Book of Wisdom : “Honorable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the gray hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age. He pleased God and was beloved of him, so that he was translated. And, being made perfect in a short time, he fulfilled a long time. For his soul pleased the Lord ; therefore hastened he to take him away.”

The divinest life the All-Father ever sent into this world, — I will make no irreverent comparison, — the life of his best-beloved Son, inspired, guided, kept by his own Holy Spirit, for his own highest designs, continued here but a little over thirty years ; yet was it not long enough for its own perfecting and readiness to be glorified, long enough for doing all the Father’s will, and long enough for sending light, comfort, and a saving power over the world and through the ages ? And those who have most resembled that highest one, how often do we see them fade in death,

or rather flower up into immortality, in the dew of their youth, or the prime of their beauty and power! Heaven wants them, and opens its pearly gates for them; and they go up in the light of the morning sun, to be crowned and forwarded on their eternal course.

And this life, over whose close we meditate, and pray, and weep to-day,—do not murmur that it has been short in the reckoning of our earthly calendar. Think, rather, how rich, how beautiful, how highly inspired and nobly spent it has been,—and still is; for is it not here still, here in its dear and sacred memories, here in its good fruits and energizing influences, and all the sweet companionships of the spirit? Was he ever so dearly loved as to-day? Was he ever so near as now to those to whom he has been always nearest? Was he ever before so wholly, so unalterably, so inseparably, their very own?

O, we must have patience with our poor frail hearts, if they keep yearning on to have their precious treasures present to the eye and the embrace, and if they bleed and break in the seeming separation, and refuse to be comforted at once in that unutterable pain and loneliness,—patience and forgiveness,—for the heart cannot see afar, and would fain keep its earthly home and joy unbroken,—Patience!

And yet we would learn, in devout and uplifted thought, to go up often and high into the mount of God, the mount of the soul's wide vision, where we may see and know that the true life is imperishable ; and that it stays most vital when it seems to go away ; and that death, though it come to such as he, so loved and so yearned for, comes of God's love, and not untimely,—that it must be right, best, happiest, as it is.

The frequency with which we are called to follow to their graves, or else are denied by the harsh exigencies of war the privilege of so following, our best and bravest, cut down so many in the flower of their age and the ripeness of their promise, may force on us at times painful misgivings as to the price we are paying for our country's salvation, and whether it is not paying too much. But no, not too much ! Think it not ! If ever we might be permitted to think it, it would be here and now. But far from us be the unworthy thought. It would profane this solemn hour, and mock this sacred presence.

This mighty mother of us all, our country, is indeed just now severe and exorbitant in her exactions upon us. She summons from the homes of her domain their best and dearest, and ap-

points to them toil and hardship and peril. She steeps her soil in her children's most precious blood. She tears her brightest jewels from her own forehead, and flings them in the dust. She sends daily her swift messengers of grief and desolation from heart to heart, and from house to house, throughout her borders. She does all this ; but she does it not in cruelty, but in love, that she may preserve her own glorious life, her own imperial sovereignty, and her benignant power to bless her children, and fold them under her brooding wings, to nourish and keep them, as she only can, in freedom, in honor, and in peace. And thus she pays the stupendous debt she owes to her afflicted people.

And she pays it not only in the promise of future blessing and protection, but she pays it now, daily, amply, and that in a higher currency than that of the mortal life and blood which she exacts. She pays it over and over in the ennobling loyalty which she awakens in millions of souls ; by the high inspiration of sacrifice and devotion which she in her needs and distresses sends thrilling, mounting, blazing through her children's hearts ; by the energies she calls forth ; by the manhood she creates to meet her exigencies ; and by the opportunities and the stimulants she provides for an

earnest life and noble heroisms. Oh ! she pays all the debt and more. She takes but mortal life, she gives the soul's life : she takes but perishable treasures, she pays back the durable riches.

The young life which so lately animated the form that lies shrouded there, — she, the great mother, has scarcely claimed and taken one more precious ; but she has paid for it, — paid *him*, and that in advance, and he knew it, felt it, — paid him in the splendid sphere of duty and sacrifice she opened to him, always to the ingenuous and nobly aspiring mind, the dearest boon that heaven or earth can grant, — in the loftier spirit she breathed into him, whereby to do valiantly, to live greatly, to die willingly.

And those who loved that life better than their own, — she pays them ; pays them in a hero's sweet and glorious memory, made their own forever, and to be to them henceforth, though amid raining tears and unutterable griefs, the divinest beauty, the sacred pride and joy and hope of their lives.

So we must not grudge what our dear country has required of us, but must give more, and take back her infinite compensations, — give all she asks and needs, — give ourselves

and our dearest,—and give on, and to the uttermost, till she is redeemed, rehabilitated, re-enthroned, the fairest, freest, benignest, most majestic among the empires of the earth.

And now let the young men take up tenderly this dear burden of their friend's body, and bear it forth to yonder garden of the Lord, and lay it reverently down in its place to rest in that sleep which God giveth to his beloved. The soul, already ascended, lives the new life with God,—to live and grow forever in power and love and blessedness,—and yet abides here also, more living than ever, for example, for inspiration, and all comforting and uplifting influence.

Farewell, thou sleeping form! All hail, thou glorified and ever-living spirit!

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